



Area IX/Flathead County Agency on Aging Advisory Council  
**MINUTES OF MEETING: November 18, 2021**

Meeting held in person and via zoom

Prepared by Christine Neater

**Call to Order:** Lois Katz called the meeting to order.

**Present:**

- **Members:** Dee Boyce, Kris Carlson, Lois Katz, Diane Queen-Miller, Jennifer Schaffner, Arleah Shechtman, Pat Sylvia and Sue Votapka. Laura Tilley and Paula Swaim via Zoom.
- **Staff:** Lisa Sheppard and Christine Neater
- **Guests:** None

**Public Comment:** No public comment.

**Chair Opening Remarks:** Lois opened the meeting by welcoming members.

**Approval of Minutes:** Minutes were reviewed. Arleah moved to approve. Dee seconded. All in favor. Motion passed.

**Election of Officers:**

**Nominating Committee** (Kris, Sue and Lois): Kris reported on the Committee's efforts to develop a slate of officers: Diane Queen-Miller for Chair and Arleah Shechtman for Vice-Chair. There were no additional nominations from the floor. Both Diane and Arleah expressed their enthusiasm, and Lisa thanked them for their willingness to serve. Jennifer moved to accept the slate and Paula seconded. All in favor. Motion passed. Lois will officially pass the gavel to Diane in January.

- Stan Harper and Constance See did not re-apply to be on the council.
- There are currently six openings and six six applications for the Council. Commissioners will make the new appointments in December and terms will begin in January.
- Lisa confirmed terms are for three years and members can serve up to three full terms (plus an initial partial term if applicable).

**By-Laws:** Diane moved to approve the revision of the By-Laws as presented at the last meeting. Sue seconded. All in favor. Motion passed. Lisa explained that the next step is to present to Commissioners for approval.

**Strategic Planning Discussion:** Council members engaged in a brainstorming session using the following questions as a guide:

1. How might the Council best fulfill its primary roles?
  2. What one, big goal might the Council shoot for?
  3. What else are members passionate about?
  4. What are next steps?
- Members talked about ways to gather and provide input into the Area Plan process, how to learn about and represent what's important to older adults in the community and to the community as a whole relative to aging services.
    - Lisa provided information about DPHHS's plan to contract with a firm, Polco, to conduct a statewide needs assessment/survey in June 2022 as part of the upcoming planning cycle (Area Plan due March 2023). Results will be specific to our area, as well as aggregated statewide. Lisa noted we have the option to purchase additional addresses to increase the validity of the results (reduce the margin of error). She expressed excitement about this opportunity as our local surveys, while valuable, are not scientific. Also, although the survey is statewide, it will be branded locally with our logo so people will trust the source. Members discussed ways to promote the survey beyond the statistical sample.
      - Lois contributed her thoughts about the importance of one-on-one connections with older adults and engaging them in conversation. She also noted past success helping people record their answers to a survey as part of that one-on-one conversation.
      - Diane suggested we connect with local media, including producing :30 public service announcements to give a general understanding of the survey before it happens.
      - Members could promote the survey to their "circle."
      - Outreach at senior housing could be effective.
      - Cities might promote the survey and/or may want to purchase additional addresses and the ability to have city-specific data. Lisa will reach out to them as we know more.
      - It was pointed out that our messaging around the survey should include both why people should fill it out (the benefit) but also reassure people we aren't going to use their personal information in any way.
    - Several people suggested members could also help promote and facilitate focus groups or other group discussions with guiding questions.
      - Some existing groups to approach are senior centers and churches (specifically Canvas and East Haven)
  - Members talked about ways they could help spread information about the Agency's mission and services.
    - Members agreed that better education and engagement of the health care community is critical to encourage them to help their older patients and family caregivers connect to us. Rayne and Laura are members of a new Council subcommittee to work with staff take on this issue. The Committee is meeting next week.

- We should focus on forming more allies who will connect people to us and amplify our message.
- Members talked about the need to educate people about the importance of planning for their older years and then supporting them in concrete ways to do that planning to reduce the number of people who come to us in crisis.
  - One idea is to develop and promote “dual purpose” events that combine information with a real take-away, like benefits applications or completed estate planning documents.
  - Members acknowledged the obstacles people face, such as fear of aging and of losing independence, experiencing the loss of loved ones or of identity/purpose, feeling overwhelmed by the changes aging can bring, etc. – and talked about the role the Agency can play in helping people overcome these obstacles. Helping people define what they want and plan around that is one way to decrease uncertainty and increase confidence.
  - We should develop outreach and tools specific to middle-age people to encourage them to plan at earlier ages.
- Members brainstormed “big goals.”
  - Paula previously suggested a really ambitious and exciting goal – that we should work toward Flathead County becoming a “blue zone,” a place people where people have good health and live long lives (into their 90s).
  - Arleah would like to see the Agency be the obvious “of course” destination for people when they have an aging issue or concern. People shouldn’t have to search for us or think hard about it, they should intuitively know where to go (because our outreach/messaging has been that effective).
- Members are passionate about:
  - Jennifer would like to see Kalispell become a senior-friendly, dementia-friendly community that is more “livable” for older adults.
  - Dee is committed to speaking out when we see something that’s not right, at both the individual and community level.
  - Sue and Kris are concerned about financial insecurity, especially as it pertains to the need for more low-income housing and options for helping older adults stay in their homes (including a freeze on property taxes).
    - Lois established a housing committee with Sue and Kris as initial members.
  - Arleah is very passionate about caregiver support noting 46% of caregivers die before the loved ones that they provide care.
  - Better outreach and engagement of the medical community.
  - Leading real community conversations about aging.
- Next steps:
  - Lisa noted that additional funding beyond federal and state dollars is going to be needed to sustain current programs and manage the inevitable growth in demand. She hopes the Council can help bring to fruition a non-profit affiliate to focus on private fund development.

**Meeting adjourned** at 3:57 pm (Motion to adjourn by Sue and seconded by Pat, all in favor).